

**COALITION FOR A BETTER MEMPHIS**  
**Shelby County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire**  
**Election Date: May 4, 2010**

**Name: Melvin Burgess**

**District for which you are running: District 2, Position 3**

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**Section 1: Qualifications and Background (2 questions)**

**Section 2: Vision and Strategies (4 questions)**

**Section 3: Improving the Education System (4 questions)**

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<b>1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND</b>
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**1. Describe your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County Commissioner. (Please answer in the space below and attach a resume.)**

As Chief Auditor of Memphis City Schools, I serve as a member of the Superintendents Executive Leadership Team and provide direction to the Division of Internal Audit in the development of audit strategies to support district-wide goals and objectives. Specifically, I am responsible for providing independent, evidence – based measures, evaluations and reports on adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency of accounting and operational controls, and the general compliance with Board policies and procedures, and state rules and regulations. Additionally, the Division of Internal Audit contributes to policy making, long range planning, and other initiatives set forth by the Superintendent.

Serving on a critical financial and operational advisory role in the decision- making process with the district has afforded me an opportunity to improve business process and educational programs while balancing the distinct needs of an urban school district thruxed into an era of transition marked by pressures on tax bases and reduced revenues.

**2. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?**

The experiences that caused my run for County Commission are as follows:

- a. **Limited Revenue Capacity** - County government continues to deal with an over reliance on property taxes as its main source of revenue.
- b. **Debt Service** – Current structure bond payments will cause county government to make difficult decisions about its services and operations to the citizens of Shelby County.
- c. **The New Economy** - The County must improve the educational levels of its workers and its reputation for creativity. To succeed in the knowledge economy, the county must attract and retain college graduates, invest in higher education and research, encourage higher

SHELBY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2010

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ MELVIN BURGESS \_\_\_\_\_

educational attainment for its citizens, and create policies that respond to the county's strengths in the global economy.

- d. **Suburbanization and Sprawl** - The county has seen sprawl beyond its control, largely by the relocation of current residents. The hollowing out of new residential development further weakens the county at its core with the persistent problems of poverty, urban disinvestment, and middle class flight.

**2. VISION AND STRATEGIES**

1. **In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Shelby County in the next four years?**

- A. Educational Funding
- B. Limited Revenue Capacity
- C. Debt Reduction

2. **Shelby County's debt is seen by many people as a threat to county government. How would you propose that the county pay down its debt? How would you prevent additional debt in the future?**

County administrators should review the current tax revenue systems in Shelby County. The County should seek a balanced form of revenue generation, while using these revenues efficiently to provide the highest degree of essential services to citizens. A propose study of the existing tax structure, seeking a more balanced structure that asks the question who live, work, and play in this county to pay their fair share.

Form partnerships between county and city government, and municipalities, to determine ways to centralize services, currently being duplicated. Functions of each government could provide a less cost through shared equipment, personal, and purchasing.

The key to long term economic stability, is establishing accountability on how government funds are spent.

3. **The Memphis City Council has taken steps over the last few years attempting to shift the burden of funding both city and county schools to Shelby County residents. What are your views regarding the best way to fund public education of Shelby County and Memphis children?**

SHELBY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2010

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ MELVIN BURGESS \_\_\_\_\_

Educational funding at the state level in Tennessee is still battling with the inequalities of not enough money and the inequities and unfairness of how money is collected and distributed. The question that is always being asked is there enough funds being distributed equitably? In my opinion there will never be enough funds in education but being 43<sup>rd</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> in certain education proficiency should not be accepted. Based on lawsuits and threats of lawsuits, the equality equation (who pays into the funding system and how much the system gets back in return) has apparently not been solved.

State funding for city, county, and charter schools within Shelby County should be a major priority, providing equal and adequate support for all students. A thorough accountability of funds allocated to these systems should be established. Capital funding for education should be coordinated with planned residential development to encourage the rebuilding of our neighborhoods and the strengthening of our households.

- 4. Some people believe that urban communities should adopt policies that encourage what is called “smart growth.” Do you believe Shelby County should have a general policy about new residential and commercial developments? If so, what should that policy be?**

Yes

The Smart Growth policy should provide continuous support to current community stakeholders such as the Memphis Regional Chamber and the Office of Community Development that are aggressively developing strategies and implementing plans to improve the community’s image, reputation, and appeal to prospective businesses and homeowners. For example, the Chamber of Commerce is working diligently to promote the regionalism concept as a means of attracting major manufacturing and other business sectors to the Mid-South. Additionally, the Office of Housing and Community Development through its redeveloping initiatives in the Downtown area and in blighted neighborhoods have produced aesthetically appealing communities that are very attractive to prospective homeowners.

**3. IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT**

- 1. What do you regard as the greatest obstacle or barrier to economic growth in Shelby County today? What can the County Commission do to reduce that impediment?**

The county must improve the educational levels of its workers and its reputation for creativity.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ MELVIN BURGESS \_\_\_\_\_

To succeed in the knowledge economy, the county must attract and retain college graduates, invest in higher education and research, encourage higher educational attainment for its citizens, and create policies that respond to the county's unique strengths in the global economy.

**2. What is your philosophy about offering incentives to companies that are considering major new investments or job expansions in Shelby County?**

As an appointed member of the Industrial Development Board offering companies incentives, new investments, or job expansion in Shelby County is beneficial, however like many major urban counties, the county faces problems caused by an aging workforce, economic and racial divisions, and low- density sprawl around the urban limits. These crosscurrents stand as obstacles to the region's ability to attract new people and new jobs. That is why county government must be the catalyst for producing not just more jobs, but quality jobs; for attracting not just more investment, but targeted investment in the knowledge economy.

**3. What is your view regarding the best way to address financing of The Med and the need for public health options?**

The best way to address financing of the Med is for the County Commission to work in consortium with the major funding or legislative bodies to develop long term strategies for continued funding. Town hall meetings should be held to determine public needs in the community.

**4. When you complete your service as commissioner, what do you want your legacy to be?**

When my term in office has been completed as a commissioner, my legacy would be that I provided leadership in ensuring a sound financial mechanism is in place that will continue to provide equitable funding for educating our children in Memphis and Shelby County.

Also, my legacy would be that I provided leadership for a better understanding that Shelby County government must be the catalyst in the "New Economy" for producing not just more jobs, but quality jobs; for attracting not just more investments, but targeted investments in the knowledge economy; for not just delivering the traditional menu of services, but services targeted at creating neighborhoods that last; and not just in engaging in raising tax revenues, but in measuring equity and sustainability in tax policy.

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